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THE · DESTRUCTION OF · LOUVAIN

BY · EDWIN · EMERSON ★
FROM · A · GRAPHIC · RECITAL . . .
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AFTER · HIS · RETURN · FROM · THE
FRONT · IN · DECEMBER · 1914 ★ ·
PUBLISHED · UNDER · THE · AUS-
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FOREWORD

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THE GERMANISTIC SOCIETY
OF CHICAGO

Louis Guenzel, Recording Secretary
332 So. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

The Destruction of Louvain.

By

EDWIN EMERSON.

I happened to be passing through Cologne on August 28th, when the first civil and military refugees from Louvain arrived there. At the railway station I saw them alight from passenger coaches on which someone had written in chalk: "Kriegsgefangene und Civilisten aus Loewen," meaning: "Prisoners of war and civilians from Louvain." As a matter of fact they appeared to be treated as mere refugees, and as such they were taken through the streets under a light military escort in the direction of the Rhine bridge.

Since then I have seen statements in English and French newspapers that these so-called prisoners of war were marched through the streets at Cologne with their hands tied behind their backs and with ropes around their necks, after which they were court-martialled and shot. I have also read a newspaper report that a priest from Louvain was lynched by a furious mob at the Cologne railway station. Of this I saw nothing, though I saw all who arrived in Cologne on that day. They numbered several hundred, mostly men of all ages in civilian clothes, with a few women and children, and also one or two priests in cassocks. The refugees appeared worn and thoroughly frightened; but nothing was done to add to their distress. The dense crowds on the streets silently watched these poor creatures pass by on their way to some detention camp across the river. There were no demonstrations whatever. All I heard said by the people standing around me was: "Arme Leute" (poor creatures).

A woman, standing next to me, asked me in Rhenish dialect: "Why have they got priests along?" A bystander answered her: "The priests stick to their parishioners." Another man said: "Perhaps the priests are held responsible for what happened in their parish."

After the refugees had crossed the bridge I asked the military press censor at Cologne how these civilians came to be prisoners and what was going to be done with them. I then heard for the first time of the tragedy of Louvain.

The censor told me that these people had been sent out of Louvain by the German military authorities in Belgium to safeguard their lives and to keep them out of trouble. He said he understood the intention of the German Government was to repatriate these people to their homes so soon as things had quieted down in Belgium. In the meanwhile, he explained, the orders were not to hold them as prisoners of war, but

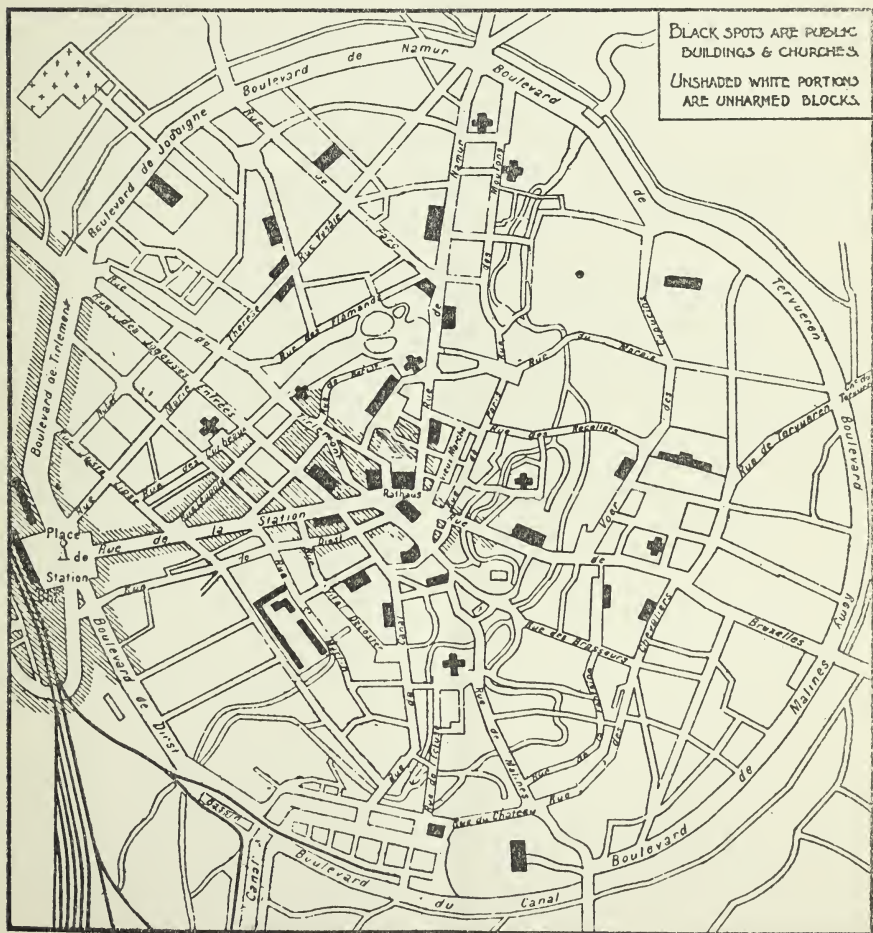
merely as civilian refugees, temporarily detained for their own safety. This rule would not apply, he said, to young Belgian men fit for military service, inasmuch as Belgium had called all her able-bodied young men to the colors. It was known, he added, that many of these prisoners from Louvain were actual soldiers or militia-men, who had merely thrown away their arms and changed their uniform for civilian clothes.

That same evening the Cologne Gazette issued an extra with a despatch from General Headquarters at the front announcing the tragedy at Louvain. This official despatch was signed by Quartermaster General von Stein. On the following morning the Cologne Gazette and other German newspapers published further details. None of these came from acknowledged eye-witnesses.

Presently I received a confidential message, brought to me by another American staff correspondent of the newspaper I represented, requesting me to proceed at once to Louvain to make a thorough impartial investigation of what happened there. By this time the refugees from Louvain were already returning there by rail under a military escort. The railroad trains to Belgium were crowded with them. Therefore, it was impracticable for me to go by rail, so I decided to go in an automobile. By the help of good friends I got a chance to go in an automobile belonging to Mr. Charles Hirsch, a Swiss book publisher. I started for Louvain without notifying any German Government authorities, since I preferred for purposes of more independent observation to go as a simple American traveler with an ordinary American passport. My companions in the automobile, besides its owner, were a Swiss newspaper man and a German chauffeur, who happened to be exempt from military service because of physical disability. With the exception of this German mechanic we all spoke French fluently. The chauffeur, on the other hand, understood Flemish. Thanks to the satisfactory credentials of my companion we had no difficulties along the way.

When we arrived in Louvain the ruins were still hot and smoking, and certain streets were littered with debris; but we had no difficulty in finding a hotel wherein to lodge, though, of course, we first had to obtain a permit from the German military authorities at Louvain. As I have already said, hundreds of refugees were returning to Louvain. All the inhabitants in evidence, of whom there were several thousands, appeared cowed and depressed; but they were left unmolested by the German troops in the town and seemed to be attending to their regular business. All the churches and many shops were open and a regular market was in full swing along the Vieux Marché in front of the destroyed library. Many of the refugees who had lost their homes, were quartered in the Manège, an old military riding school, the roof of which was badly damaged. At the same hotel with us lodged a Prussian officer, Judge Advocate Sievers, who had just come to Louvain to conduct an official court of inquiry concerning the recent happenings in the town. There was also a Mr. Sittart, a member of the German Reichstag, who likewise was making an investigation. With him were several German newspaper correspondents, among them a Dr. Schotthoefer of the staff of the "Frankfurter Zeitung."

During the time we stopped at Louvain we took many photographs and talked with all manner of eye-witnesses of the tragedy—natives, burghers, women, priests, friars, sisters of charity, Belgian municipal officials, German officers, active soldiers, reservists, and with two foreign newspaper men, both of whom were Hollanders. My companions always talked as neutral Switzers, while I always made myself known as an American.



town was destroyed—to be sure this was the central and therefore the oldest and most closely built part.

One seventh is also the estimate of my fellow war-correspondent, Mr. James O'Donnell Bennett, of the Chicago Tribune, who was likewise at Louvain. The statement which I have seen published in certain English newspapers that 1074 town houses and 1823 suburban houses at Louvain were destroyed is a crass exaggeration. At most a few hundred houses were destroyed in the town proper. In the suburbs only the eastern district near the railway station suffered perceptibly, but that district was almost totally demolished, especially the houses along the Rue de Station. When I say "suburbs" I mean outlying parts of the town proper, not surrounding villages. Of the neighboring villages the little place of Haeraat, where a passing German column was attacked from ambush, was completely burnt down.

Presently I shall explain to you precisely how various historic buildings and churches either suffered or escaped destruction; but first let me tell the story of what actually happened, so far as I was able to make out from all my talks with eye-witnesses on the spot.

The first indication of the approach of the German army was a German aeroplane flying over the town on the morning of August 17th. The first German troops entered Louvain on the afternoon of August 19th, a Wednesday. On the night before there had been fighting at Tirlemont and at Wespelaer and Cumptich near Louvain, where the Belgians were routed. The Germans there captured a flag and two field pieces. The regular Belgian troops fell back toward Malines (Mechelin), whence it was reported that French and English troops were advancing by forced marches toward Louvain. Many of the Louvain militiamen, who had taken part in the battle at Tirlemont, fell back into Louvain. They fought a rear-guard action at Lovenjoul near Louvain, where some Belgian lancers and some German uhlans were killed. There was also another rear-guard fight at Wespelaer, where some German uhlans who galloped into the village were shot down by men concealed in the houses. Some Belgian lancers, fleeing into Louvain, tried to rally their comrades on the Place du Peuple, but in vain. Then they rode off in the direction of Malines.

The mayor and aldermen of Louvain decided that it was hopeless to defend the town and therefore sent out emissaries under a white flag proclaiming Louvain "an open town." At the same time the remaining militia-men in the town were bidden to disarm and to return to their civil pursuits. A proclamation in French and Flemish was posted on the street-corners, of which I still saw some in Louvain. This proclamation said:

"To civilians. The Minister of the Interior recommends to civilians, whenever the enemy may appear: firstly, not to fight; secondly, not to indulge in insults or threats; thirdly, to remain indoors and to close all shutters, lest it may be said that there has been provocation; fourthly, if soldiers occupy a house in order to defend themselves, to vacate it, lest it be said that civilians did the shooting.

Any act of violence committed by individual civilians would be a veritable crime, which the law punishes with arrest and condemns, since it might serve as a pretext for bloody retaliation, for pillage, or for massacre of innocent people—women and children.”

When the first German troops approached Louvain the Belgian field artillery was still firing near Lovenjoul, but presently the roar of the guns died away and the Germans were suffered to enter Louvain unmolested. This was before the surrender of Brussels. The German soldiers marched into the town with drums and fifes playing, while the men in the ranks sang “Die Wacht am Rhein.” Some of the infantry detachments belonged to the 165th Prussian Fuseliers, of the seventh German army corps. The officer who took definite charge of the town was Major von Manteuffel from Altenburg in Thuringia. The commanding officer of the staff headquarters established at Louvain was Captain of Cavalry, Carl Friedrich von Esmarch, a son of Princess Henriette of Sleswick-Holstein, an aunt of the German Empress.

Immediately after the arrival of the German troops the following proclamation in German, French and Flemish was posted on the street corners:

“To Belgians: The death penalty will be inflicted on all inhabitants, not uniformed as soldiers, who shoot at our soldiers or who otherwise take part in fighting, who render active military aid to Belgian troops or to their allies, who commit any act detrimental to life and public safety, or who act as spies. All arms must be delivered to the authorities. Whatever civilian is found with arms renders himself liable to severe punishment, in case of aggravating circumstances, death. Townships or hamlets where the inhabitants attack our troops, will be burnt down. Wherever bridges, railways or telegraph wires are destroyed the nearest settlement will be held responsible.”

Soon the German troops were billeted about the town. Previously all Belgian flags had disappeared from the public buildings and houses. In accordance with a German proclamation of August 15th, which was likewise posted on the street corners, hostages were required, consisting of one municipal officer, one clergyman and two leading citizens. In this case the mayor of Louvain, the Jesuit rector of the university, and two citizens were taken into custody. The usual requisitions were made, especially for arms. Very few arms were surrendered. In money contribution the German commander first collected 2000 francs and then demanded 5000 more, of which only 3,800 were collected by the city treasurer of Louvain, Mr. Van Ernem.

The inhabitants submitted with apparent resignation to the inevitable. Many of the Flemings became quite friendly with the troops particularly at the market where the German soldiers bought large quantities of supplies, paying for them with German money. Almost all the shops reopened. So far as I could gather from my native informants no unpleasant incident happened at Louvain during the first six days following the first entry of the German troops. Fresh troops were constantly

passing through the town by rail and on foot in the direction of Brussels and Malines, and new troops took the place of some of those who had come first.

During this week some of the German soldiers in the town got very much excited over stories of guerilla atrocities, reported to have been committed in the immediate vicinity of Louvain. Thus it was reported that Colonel Stenger, commanding at Aerschot, near Louvain, was shot in the back by the son of the burgomaster of that town, M. Tielemans, as he was standing on the balcony of the burgomaster's house. It was further reported from Wespelaer that five German troopers quartered there were found in their beds with their throats cut. Another story from Liege reported that a number of German soldiers sleeping in a barn were burned to death through treachery. A similar story came from Clermont. Blood-curdling rumors also reached Louvain of stern German reprisals against native guerillas and snipers in the vicinity. All these happenings naturally made bad blood, still there were no noteworthy outbreaks of the smouldering resentment.

On the night of August 24th and early in the morning of August 25th private word reached Louvain that the Belgian troops, who were shut up in Antwerp, on that same day would make a sortie in force in the direction of Malines. Should they be successful in cutting their way through the Germans, it was expected that they would be joined by strong French and English columns, and that all the inhabitants of that region would rise against the Germans to drive them headlong out of Belgium all along the line of Malines, Louvain, Tirlemont, and Liege. This secret message, so I was told by a sexton of one of the Louvain churches, first reached a certain Jesuit priest, now dead, who passed the warning along to some of his brother Jesuits and parishioners. However this may be, it is certain that the secret was well kept, for none of the German officers or soldiers in Louvain got any inkling of it.

The German commandant Major Manteuffel, felt himself so secure that on the morning of the same day, August 25th, he posted official notices congratulating the inhabitants on their irreproachable peaceful attitude. At the same time he released the hostages, who had been held in light custody.

As a matter of fact the Belgian garrison of Antwerp on that day did make its promised sortie and fought its way through so far as Malines, where the sortie was stopped and repulsed with heavy losses to the Belgians. They got no support from the French or English. Late in the afternoon the roar of artillery fire in the direction of Malines could be distinctly heard at Louvain. The sound of the firing seemed to be coming nearer and nearer. About six in the evening word reached the German commandant at Louvain that the German advance forces between Brussels and Malines were hotly engaged and might need support. The call to arms was sounded at Louvain and all available mobile troops were despatched under forced marching orders in the direction of Malines. Major von Manteuffel preceded them in an automobile.

About the same time Captain von Esmarch, of the General Staff, brought some German reinforcements of the Landsturm battalion of Neuss.

These came into Louvain by rail from Liege. They were determined to act as a reserve.

About one hour later it so happened that a bedraggled troop of German stragglers, among them some wounded, some sick, and many foot-sore soldiers of all arms, came limping into Louvain. Instantly a report spread among the citizens that these men were the first of the defeated Germans fleeing from the battlefield of Malines, where all of the German army was believed to have been completely overwhelmed and routed. This rumor spread like wild-fire all over town.

I have heard it stated that these German stragglers were mistaken for enemies by their comrades in town and were received with a volley of rifle fire which they returned in kind, thus causing the general massacre. Of this story I never could get any convincing confirmation in Louvain. The stragglers came into Louvain leisurely and while it was still daylight; therefore, such a mistake would appear to have been out of the question.

Heretofore, the curfew hour at Louvain, as established by the German military authorities, was at seven; but on this day when the hostages were released as a sign of confidence, a special order from Major von Manteuffel had extended the hour to 8 P. M. Citizens were then expected to close their doors and window shutters; but soldiers of the German army of occupation were allowed to remain on the street one hour longer.

At 8 P. M., accordingly, all doors and shutters were closed. Just before the sounding of retreat, one hour later, the German soldiers were surprised to behold two sky rockets, one red and then one green, rising above the dark town. Then the cathedral clock struck nine. Before the German headquarters in the town hall of the main plaza a bugler blew the retreat.

Almost at the same moment there came the crackle of rifle fire from all over town. The fusillade came through loop holes from behind closed doors and shutters, from attic and mansarde windows, from cellar holes and other hidden points of vantage.

Many German soldiers were shot down while sitting at open air tables; others while running through the streets; others again while trying to seek cover or to form ranks under orders of their bewildered officers.

Judging from the German casualties the heaviest guerilla fire came from certain buildings along the Vieux Marché and from the University Library, which were believed to be unoccupied, and also from a large building opposite the railway station, where the hidden snipers brought an unsuspected machine-gun into play against the German reserve troops bivouacking in the station buildings and in the railroad yards. Of course the surprised German soldiers, who were scattered all over town, fired back at their assailants as best they could whenever they saw flashes of gunfire in the dark. It may well be in the confusion of the nocturnal street-fighting and the wild stampede of frightened wagon teams and loose horses that some of the soldiers mistook some of their own comrades for foes.

At all events the furious street battle lasted all that night and part of the next day, with renewed outbursts wherever the German soldiers

fought their way into suspected houses or were ordered to smoke out their enemies by setting fire to houses harboring guerillas.

As a result of the first night's fighting, August 25-26, some sixty German soldiers were found dead along the Vieux Marché with over a hundred dead in and around the railroad station. I myself saw the fresh dug graves of some two hundred German soldiers killed at Louvain. Several officers also fell, among them a General Staff captain, who was found in a house with his throat cut. No less than five staff officers were wounded on the Place du Peuple alone. All their horses there were killed.

Of course, many more natives were killed, among them many innocent people, some women and a few children. Many men of Louvain, who were found with weapons in their possession or with hands and faces blackened by powder stains, were stood up against walls and were shot by the infuriated soldiers. Two fanatical priests were shot near the monument on the market place because they were caught in the act of distributing cartridges to some men. In the vaults of the church of St. Peter some 350 Belgian army rifles with ammunition belts were discovered by the Germans.

Later many innocent people were made prisoners and were marched under guard up and down the streets of Louvain as hostages, in order to put a stop to the persistent rifle fire from the houses. This was on the two successive days, August 26th and 27th, but even then some of the soldiers escorting these prisoners, and likewise some of the innocent hostages, were shot down by snipers firing from hidden places. A German gasoline convoy went up in flames and the fire spread. Many houses were deliberately set on fire by the soldiers, hunting for their enemies.

On the afternoon of Thursday, August 27th, when the central district of the town was in flames, guerilla fighting was still being kept up in various parts of the town. Then the inhabitants were warned by a public crier, accompanied by a drummer, who marched up and down the empty streets announcing that artillery fire from German field guns which had been summoned from outside would be brought to bear on the town. All peaceful citizens, many of whom were already huddled together at various detention places, were warned to leave the town.

In execution of this order several blocks of houses were actually shot down by artillery and other houses were riddled by German machine-guns. More than 20,000 inhabitants were sent out of the city, many on foot under military escort toward Tirlemont or Malines, while others went by rail to Aix and Cologne. These last were the refugees whom I met in Cologne. Of the 45,000 original inhabitants of Louvain barely a few hundred remained. Of these most were killed. I could form no private estimate of their actual number, since most of their bodies were lost under the ashes of their burning houses. Afterward the Germans unearthed 42 of these. This was down to September 8th. Previously some three hundred bodies of natives had been buried under German supervision. Among the more noted dead were Professors Ponthière

and Lenertz, Messrs. Van Ertryck and David, two Jesuit fathers and over a score of university students and volunteer militia men.

The following is the account given us by the German Staff captain, Baron von Esmarch, who was wounded by four shots from a Belgian machine-gun during the first night's fighting, when his horse was shot under him:

"On Tuesday, August 25th at 6 P. M., I arrived at the Louvain railway station with a detachment of reserves of the battalion of Neuss. We had just unloaded the horses and detrained our first detachment, and I was leading them to the Belgian lancers' barracks, where we were to put up our horses for the night, when our adjutant brought me an order to sound the alarm, as our troops were in battle about ten kilometers away in the direction of Malines. Accordingly I had the alarm sounded and posted my men on the Place du Peuple. While we were stationed there some of our outgoing troops passed us. Meanwhile we had supper.

"I had just ridden to the upper end of the Plaza when I heard the cathedral clock strike nine. All lights were out. Suddenly I saw a sky rocket, followed by another. Instantly there came rifle fire from all the houses around the Plaza. The inhabitants were firing from behind closed shutters. I could tell this from the flashes. Evidently loop-holes had been drilled through the shutters. It was clear to me that the assault had been thoroughly prepared. From the direction of the railway station I heard the pop-pop-pop of a Belgian machine-gun. I started at a gallop to summon our reserves.

"In the middle of the Plaza stood a number of our transport wagons. As I was galloping past these wagons I heard the horrible rattle of a Belgian machine-gun close by. At the same instant my horse fell under me. While I lay pinned under my bleeding horse, I received four shots and a scratch from one glancing shot. Then a runaway team of horses ran over me and a wheel of a heavy transport wagon passed over my breast. I lost consciousness.

"When I came to, I found myself lying in the dark on a blanket under a wagon. Some of my men were near me, firing from behind a barricade of wagons. I learned that my orderly had dragged me out from under my dead horse and had thus saved my life. Several of my fellow officers had likewise been put *hors de combat* by being shot from their horses. Fortunately I still had strength enough to issue commands to my men, most of whom were within call among the wagons in the Plaza.

"In the darkness, apparently, the snipers lurking behind their closed shutters had not noticed that my company of men had stayed behind in the Plaza when our other troops were summoned away by the battle alarm outside. The methodical rifle fire that was kept up by our men silenced the snipers around the Plaza. Now my men stormed into one house after the other smashing the doors with their rifle butts, and setting fire to various houses. So soon as the smoke became too thick the snipers came rushing downstairs and

out of the houses. They were frenzied men with military rifles, shot-guns, revolvers and knives. As they sprang from behind their cover they were shot down by our men. I issued strict orders that no unarmed person, woman or child should be fired at.

"While this was happening in the center of the town, another of our troop trains rolled into the station and the men were detrained at the double quick. They, too, came under a withering machine-gun fire from a house opposite the station. Many of our men were killed there. Issuing from the station under fire they charged up the long street leading from the station and joined in the battle. Meanwhile the shots from the houses were kept up all that night and throughout the next day.

"My wounds had all been caused by a machine-gun, which was planted on the balcony of an hotel that stood at a street extension, two houses from the corner of the Plaza. My men later reported that they had crawled along the hotel walls and had killed the men manning the machine-guns from beneath the balcony openings.

"My men then stormed the hotel, bayoneted the armed scullions and waiters inside and set fire to the hotel. With several other wounded men I was carried to a nearby hospital in the Dominican cloister. There were several monks in cowls in the hospital whom my men had to threaten with their bayonets before they would let us enter.

"While I lay at the hospital we were fired on from the houses opposite, so that our men had to storm those houses. On the following day we invalids were carried to the railway station and were again fired upon while on the way. All this time the fight was still raging in the city. Later I was taken to a field hospital outside Louvain where I was attended by Dr. Hoesch, a Belgian surgeon, and by several Belgian Catholic sisters of mercy, who nursed all us invalids there bravely and devotedly."

Afterward this officer was transported to the German field hospital at Liège and thence to Kiel, where his home was.

Captain von Esmarch's first lieutenant, who brought the third company of the battalion of Neuss to Louvain on a train following that of Captain von Esmarch, told the following story:

"We were due to arrive at Louvain at 9 P. M., August 25th, coming from Liège. As our train rolled into Louvain, even before we reached the station, a hail of bullets struck our cars, shattering windows and wounding several men. Two of the men died of their wounds. Our train came to a sudden halt in the railroad yard and we detrained in a hurry. Bullets were whistling all around us. I could hear a machine-gun. It made different sound from that of our machine-guns.

"There we stood near the railroad sheds as in a *cul de sac*. I had no idea what was the matter. We had heard something of an approach of an English column to aid the Belgians, who might come

out of Antwerp, so I feared that the Belgians had really broken through and that the English had got past our forces and had taken Louvain.

"But as we deployed under fire across the railroad yard we met a small detachment of our railroad troops, who told us that the civil population of Louvain had risen against us all over town. We had arrived just in time for the opening of the fight. The other company of our battalion, they said, was fighting somewhere in the center of the town under Esmarch's command.

"Right across the street from the entrance of the railway station the Belgians had a machine gun. They were firing into the station so hard that we had to deploy to the right and the left of the building. At the other end of the station street there was another Belgian machine-gun detachment firing from behind a barricade erected on a balcony of a house that projected into the street.

"I took my men up the street on the double quick. An adjutant, running up from behind, transmitted an order to me to take a hundred men, or as many as I could quickly muster up to a hundred, herewith to storm two houses half way up the street, from the windows of which people were firing. My orders were to seize and send back all young men encountered, and to seize any arms or ammunition. I complied with my orders, dividing my men into two firing platoons, who presently succeeded in storming both houses. Other adjoining houses likewise had to be stormed.

"These houses, in all of which my men found men with arms, were set on fire and the prisoners were sent back for drumhead court martials.

"During the fighting, my men were joined by other platoons. Again and again, as we worked our way around the street corners we came under fire. It seemed as if the whole population had risen against us. Right and left houses were set on fire. All the central part of the town was lit up by flames, with thick black clouds of smoke rolling above us. It was a terrible spectacle.

"During the night I was told that some thirty Belgian men, caught with weapons in their hands, had been stood up against walls and shot. Wednesday morning early our company was recalled to protect the station. Again we were shot at, and again we had to sally forth to the attack. A captured Belgian machine-gun with ammunition now was being used by our men. More houses were set on fire and more prisoners were taken—fully half a hundred, among them a priest and several Belgian soldiers disguised in civilian clothes.

"Later I had to take my company into other parts of the city where all the houses were still standing. Here, too, we were fired upon from behind closed doors and windows. My men became almost unmanageable. Some dreadful things happened; but what could I do? War is hard.

"On the third night we bivouacked in the railway station. Now we were left unmolested. My men slept the sleep of exhaustion. We had several wounded and dead among them. Our dead were buried early next morning. During the night we were alarmed by more firing in a distant quarter of the town, but other troops attended to that alarm. After that we had only patrol duty."

Here is another version, told by Monsignor Coenraets, the vice-rector of the University of Louvain, a Belgian clergyman, who came out of the burning city together with other refugees, among whom were some of his fellow professors, clergymen and sisters of mercy. This is what he had to say immediately after the tragedy:

"I cannot deny that our people shot pitilessly at the German soldiers. By the sound of the firing I was able to distinguish very well between German and Belgian shots. What I heard during the first five minutes of the general fusillade were no German shots.

"Later I was taken into custody and had to serve as one of the hostages for the town. This was because I was superintendent of the Lyceum and therefore was supposed to have influence over the people. Relays of hostages alternated with each other in reporting at the town hall, where each group in turn had to be at call from three in the afternoon until the next day. On the first day after the revolt the burgomaster and the rector of the university had to report. On the following day the lot fell to the vice-burgomaster and to me.

"As I entered my duty on that day, at three in the afternoon, a most terrible shooting started up anew all over the town. By the different sound we could tell it was not from the German rifles. It could not come from regular Belgian troops for there were none of them left in the town. Towards evening the shooting ceased, and we walked up and down the Rue de la Station with a white flag in order to quiet the people. Father Dillon spoke to them in Flemish, Senator Orbau de Xivry in French. Then we returned to the city hall and were allowed to retire under guard.

"Next morning our quarters were changed from the city hall to the railway station. On our way there, under a white flag, we stopped over and over again. Father Dillon read aloud in Flemish and French a proclamation of the German military commander, which said: 'We have taken hostages from you, and if another shot is fired we shall have to shoot them!' Two German officers walked beside us with pistols in their hands ready to shoot. With us came several sisters of charity. Women, children and aged men of Louvain stood around us with uplifted hands crying to the people in the houses not to shoot at the soldiers so as to save us from death. Behind us marched twenty German soldiers with their rifles in their hands.

"While Father Dillon was reading the proclamation at the corner of the Rue Frederic Lints, the shooting at Germans from hidden places began again. We gave ourselves up for lost; but the officers

with us mercifully restrained the soldiers. Notwithstanding the shooting, we were led through the streets for five more hours, and during that time at different points of the city we read aloud the proclamation again and again.

"At three in the afternoon we were taken back to the station, completely tired out from the nervous strain. The officers and soldiers with us showed the effect just as we did. There we were furnished with a hot meal. I was then allowed to go home, as my time of service had expired. A German military surgeon, Dr. Berg-hausen of Cologne, magnanimously offered to accompany me. I owe him my life. We had walked as far as the Rue Leopold when a shot came from behind a door of a house facing the grain market. At once some German soldiers on patrol leveled their rifles at me. The German surgeon threw himself before me, covering me with his own body; so I was saved.

"I passed the night in the Dominican cloister. On the next day, because the shooting from the houses still continued, the German commander told me that the houses would have to be leveled with artillery. Together with members of the religious orders, charity sisters, aged folk, women and children, as well as some wounded soldiers and civilians, I boarded a military train which in twenty hours brought us to Aix-la Chapelle. After some days there, I was given permission to return to Louvain."

Monsignor Coenraets' version was corroborated by a Dominican friar, whose name I unfortunately did not catch. In my presence this friar made the following declaration to my traveling companion, the Swiss newspaper man, who sent the statement to his newspaper in Zurich. This was the friar's story:

"After the first entry of the German troops we had complete quiet at Louvain. In the churches an exhortation from the arch-bishop of Malines was read from the pulpits advising our parishioners to bow to the authorities by abstaining from violence in word or deed. I myself read aloud this appeal from the pulpit after regular service on Tuesday, August 25th. In the afternoon of that day secret word reached us that our men had come out of Antwerp, had beaten the Germans at Malines, and that our army together with British and French troops were hot on the trail of the Germans, who were fleeing toward Louvain.

"Soon after the arrival of this news we could hear cannon fire in the direction of Malines. This put everybody in a state of wild excitement. Word was passed around that now the time had come to get rid of the hated Germans.

"Before nightfall a column of German fugitives came in. They appeared discouraged and desperate. Most of the remaining German soldiers immediately were called to arms. Hurriedly they left the city, one detachment following after the other in hot haste. The German commandant also was seen leaving Louvain in an automobile.

"At once the joyful news spread that the German army had been beaten, and was in full retreat, and that the hour for vengeance was at hand. It was whispered about that the signal for rising would be given at the proper time. Soon after I first heard of this signal, somebody let off a sky rocket. It was then already dark. Immediately shots came from many houses. They were shooting at the few German soldiers remaining on the streets or camping on the open squares. The fusillade spread to the whole city. The German soldiers, who were running in every direction, shot back at the houses. The street fighting became general and lasted all night. A gasoline tank blew up. The flames lit up the sky. Before morning many houses in the center of the town and near the railway station were burning.

"When daylight came the German soldiers recaptured some of the hostages whom they had released only the day before. Among them were the mayor, the prefect of the university, our sub-prior of the Dominicans, two priests of other orders and four rich tradesmen. These gentlemen were marched through the streets under a white flag and had to read aloud proclamations in French and Flemish advising the people to keep quiet. Nevertheless the firing from the houses was kept up. Some irresponsible miscreants not only shot at the soldiers escorting the hostages but even at the military surgeon accompanying them, though he wore a brassard with a red cross on it. I was told that he was wounded. All Wednesday night these horrors continued. Many houses went up in flames especially on the Boulevard de Tirlemont.

"On Thursday, August 27th, at 8:30 in the morning, a German officer with some soldiers came to our cloister and requested our fathers to go about to announce that the city would be bombarded, unless the shooting stopped. We were requested to tell the people to leave everything as it was and to come to the railway station empty-handed.

"At the same time the hostages were again marched through the streets, proclaiming in loud tones that they themselves would be shot by their military guards unless the people stopped shooting. None the less some crazy men, hidden in their barricaded houses, took shots at the soldiers accompanying the hostages and likewise at German stretcher-bearers and military surgeons who were carrying away the wounded. There was desultory shooting the whole day. In the evening another proclamation, commanding that the revolt should cease, was read aloud at street corners by certain hostages. A German officer, riding through the streets with a white flag and a bugler behind him, announced in loud tones that if the firing continued, the city would be laid level by artillery. He advised all peaceful inhabitants to come to the railway station.

"At nine in the morning we were all at the station. The wounded Germans and Belgians, had been brought from our hospital in the cloister to the station where they were bedded on cots in the waiting room. We Dominicans were told that a train would

be ready for us at two o'clock. We boarded the train at that hour. Long before this hour many thousand refugees had left Louvain in every direction. As our train pulled out, the artillery fire began. From the car windows we saw fire and smoke everywhere. The market halls were burning, likewise the roof of St. Peters, likewise the University Library. After we had spent a few days in Aix we were allowed to come back to Louvain."

This account of the friar was corroborated by two Belgian sisters of mercy, who unreservedly blamed the inhabitants for the dreadful affair. In my presence one of these sisters told Mr. Sittart, the German Reichstag deputy, who appeared interested in Catholic affairs, that the Louvain tragedy was the result of the mistaken belief of the inhabitants that the Germans in Belgium had been routed and were on their last legs. The most vivid account of an eye-witness was given to me by the Dutch correspondent of the "New Rotterdam Courant" in Louvain. He said:

"I arrived in Louvain from Tirlemont late on Tuesday evening, August 25th, when the street fighting was in full blast. A few hours earlier, when most of the German troops had left the town to join in the battle at Malines, some natives hidden in a house opposite the railway station, where some German troops had just arrived by train, started shooting at the soldiers. Thereupon shots came from neighboring houses and forthwith the shooting spread from house to house and from street to street.

"German soldiers were killed in the station, in front of it, and nearby—more than I could count. Many more were wounded. Horses were struck by bullets and galloped frantically through the streets, some of them dragging wagons. Many horses lay dead. There was wild confusion everywhere in the darkness. Peeping out through a window in the station building I could plainly see the flashes from a machine gun on a roof opposite. Later the Germans stormed this building and captured that machine gun.

"Generally nobody knew where most of the shots were coming from. Wherever the German soldiers saw flashes of gunfire they attacked that building and broke into the doors. Furious fighting followed in and around the houses from which the shots had come. Any civilian, who was caught with a gun in his hands—or wherever the Germans found arms hidden in his house—was shot on the spot. Wherever a figure showed at a window the soldiers shot into the window. Of course, many innocent people must have lost their lives in the general confusion; but the soldiers were too wild to be able to tell the difference in the darkness. Those people who were plainly innocent—women, sick people, old folks and children—were summoned forth and driven to places of detention outside of the town.

"A German officer told me that it would not be safe for me to remain at the station. He said that artillery had been summoned from the outside. Just then crowds of prisoners were brought to the station. There were several hundred of them, among them

priests, women and children. They were afraid they were going to be shot by the infuriated soldiers. I did hear one soldier say, if the shooting in the town did not cease, that the Germans ought to shoot every tenth prisoner. One of the prisoners overheard this and began to wail. Some houses in the neighborhood went up in flames. While I was talking with an excited German officer several shots from windows across the street struck close to us. More shooting could be heard down the street. A frantic prisoner in a workman's blouse, who had been taken with a smoking pistol in his hand, was being court martialled by two officers. Presently he was led out into the yard and was shot.

"Outside, horses and cattle were stampeding up and down the street neighing and bellowing frantically. Houses were burning here and there and we could hear the crash and deep booming of fallen roofs and walls. A gas tank blew up with a great red flash. It was a night of terror.

"Next morning, when I cautiously ventured forth in the company of some German soldiers, I saw many dead bodies littering the streets—of soldiers as well as of civilians. I saw a dead priest lying face downward near the monument on the Place du Peuple. At another place an old man with white hair lay dead. Further on lay a dead woman. Evidently they had ventured forth in the dark and had been shot in the confusion.

"Further on I saw the body of another dead priest. His cassock was covered with mud and blood. It was a horrible sight. I cannot tell you all the horrid things I saw. Later came the artillery fire. They shot down the houses in the center of the city. By the heroic efforts of some German officers and railway soldiers the old town hall and the church of St. Peter were saved from the flames. They dynamited buildings adjoining them. They also saved the cloister of Mont César. The German Commandant, Major Mantuffel, who was away and came back to the city only after the fight was well under way, himself saved that old cloister because of its art treasures. He did this notwithstanding the fact that shots were said to have come from the tower of the cloister. But the old University Library in the center of the town was burnt down during the first night. I saw it burn. All was destroyed but the front wall. It was all like a horrible nightmare.

"So far as I could make out it all came from a false report of a German defeat near Louvain on the day before. It is a fact that on the day of my arrival at Louvain there was fighting near Brussels. I could hear the sound of artillery as I went from Tirlemont to Louvain. Two days afterward, in the midst of the flames and the confusion at Louvain, I came across a German officer who said he had been in a battle near Malines on August 25th. He asserted positively that a sortie of four Belgian divisions from Antwerp had been stopped and repulsed there by the Germans. The French and English who were to help them had failed to connect. This officer also asserted that four German armies were advancing into France

and that the army under von Kluck had reached a point only eighty kilometers from Paris."

Another correspondent of the Amsterdam Handelsblad, who was in Louvain, told me that he had made a special investigation of the story that the fight had started from German soldiers mistakenly shooting at each other. From what he had gathered he was convinced that this story was false. This same correspondent was furthermore convinced that the trouble had its origin in the fact that the Belgian militiamen had not surrendered their arms, when bidden to do so, but had either kept them or passed them on to others of their fellow citizens.

I might give many other accounts of this tragedy; but why take up more time since I have stated the main essentials? In all fairness I should mention that I met many natives who told me privately that the firing of the German soldiers had been absolutely unprovoked, and that they personally knew nothing of the guerilla firing from houses. Some insisted that it was the outcome of a drunken debauch, certain Bavarian troops having looted the Louvain brewery. As a matter of fact I found that the Louvain brewery had been left unharmed, nor was there any record of Bavarian troops having formed a part of the garrison. My own impression of Bavarians, as I know them, is that they are so used to drinking beer that the consumption of more beer away from home would scarcely make them fighting-drunk.

Here is the Belgian official version of the affair, as published in London from a telegram of the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Belgian legation in London, dated Antwerp, August 28th:

"Tuesday evening a German army corps, after suffering a severe defeat, retired in disorder into Louvain. German sentries, who stood at the gates thought the enemy was approaching, and fired on their fugitive countrymen, whom they mistook for Belgians. Notwithstanding all protests of the Louvain authorities the Germans, in order to hide their blunder, insisted that they had been fired upon by natives, although the natives had been completely disarmed one week before. Without any investigation and without listening to any testimony, the German commandant of Louvain gave orders that the city was to be completely destroyed. German soldiers with hand bombs set fire to the town at all four corners. The wonderful church of St. Peter, all the university buildings, the library and the scientific institutes were delivered over to the flames. Thus Louvain, the spiritual capital of the Netherlands since the fifteenth century, is now nothing but an ash heap. This crime against humanity is without precedence in history."

Now that I have given all these various versions of credible eyewitnesses and others, I will make free to state my own conclusion, as formed after sifting all the firsthand testimony, whether corroborative or contradictory, that I was able to gather at Louvain. My conclusion is that the outbreak at Louvain was the result of the mistaken impression of many of the inhabitants that the Germans were being beaten in other parts of Belgium and that the hour for Belgian vengeance had come.

Had the people of Louvain really given up all their hidden arms and ammunition, as they were called upon to do by their own authorities, the outbreak would never have happened. The fact that machine guns were brought into play against the Germans shows plainly that the revolt must have been in some measure premeditated and prepared; since peaceful civilians do not have machine guns, neither do they have ribbons with machine gun ammunition, neither do they have trained gunners at hand to serve them. While I was at Louvain I saw with my own eyes one of these Belgian machine guns, said to have been captured opposite the railway station. The gun showed marks of rifle bullets. While I was at Louvain I also took note of the fact that most of the houses that were spared had chalk inscriptions on their doors and shutters, saying: "Schonen! Unschuldige Leute." (Spare them! Innocent people). On the other hand I noticed that the houses and buildings that were burnt out in many instances showed the marks of rifle bullets on their walls.

I also noticed a new proclamation by the acting burgomaster of Louvain, which was being posted on the walls while I was there. The following is my translation of the original French and Flemish text:

"In vain have we searched for the members of our municipal council. The last one of them, Alderman Smit, turned over his official papers to me on August 30th. I consider it my duty to take over the affairs of our municipality, together with some well-known citizens aiding me. At the suggestion of the German military authorities I request all inhabitants of Louvain to return to their accustomed vocations. The regulations issued by my predecessor remain in force, to-wit: It is forbidden to walk abroad after 7 P. M., Belgian time. All arms and munitions must be forthwith surrendered at the town hall. All hostile demonstrations against the German army must cease. If these conditions are fulfilled I am assured by the German military authorities that no inhabitant will be molested or curtailed in his liberties. The city will be policed in the day time by municipal volunteers, bearing a brassarde of the colors of our city and an identification card, properly stamped by me. The city hall is open for public business. (Signed) A. Neerincx."

In regard to the total destruction of Louvain, as falsely reported in the Belgian official account, and in regard to the demolition of Louvain's public buildings, monuments, and art treasures, I shall now give you the result of my own observations there.

The worst loss, from an aesthetic and historic point of view was the burning of the rich library of the University in the old Cloth Hall, a Gothic structure dating from 1317. Only the front wall of this building was left standing. The librarian, Professor P. Delannoy, told me that it had contained some 200,000 works, mostly of church literature. Among these were nearly a thousand old parchment manuscripts, the most valuable of which was a holograph of the famous Thomas à Kempis. There were also some 380 incunabula, a valuable collection of old coins, and also several old portraits by Flemish masters. From a scholar's point

of view this must, of course, be considered an irreparable loss. Other valuable buildings that were destroyed are the Academy of Fine Arts, which was an old sixteenth century hall, the Court of Justice, which was likewise a sixteenth century structure, the Municipal Opera House, the "Table Ronde" which was a private club with some valuable modern paintings, and the old Collegium Leodiense of the University. The roof of the Collegial Church of St. Peter, generally misnamed the "Cathedral," was also badly damaged by the fire, though by no means irreparably.

All the other churches in Louvain were spared, as were all the other university buildings and, most gratifying of all, the old town hall with its beautiful late Gothic façade, were completely spared. They were saved through the valiant efforts of Major von Manteuffel and other officers of his staff including Colonel Block of the railway engineers, who used every means to save this building. At the time when the flames were creeping across the high roofs from house to house in the compactly built center of the town, everybody thought that the old town hall was doomed. It happened to be covered with wooden scaffolding for renovation work. This added to its danger. Therefore a company of German railway troops were summoned, who succeeded in bringing one of the municipal fire engines. All day long they worked to save the structure. At the risk of their lives the soldiers climbed on the roofs of the adjoining burning houses, dragging the hose along. When the water gave out, it was decided to dynamite the adjoining buildings. First the houses next to the town hall were dynamited in a very skillful manner after every window of the town hall had been opened so that the blasts would not harm that structure. While the men were working in this way they were fired at by snipers in hidden places.

The church of St. Peter, as I have said is practically intact. It was lucky to escape in view of the fact that hidden arms were found in the church. Fortunately its little sacrament house, a Gothic work of art in carved stone by De Layans, the architect of the town hall, escaped unharmed, as did also the Cathedral organ with its handsome carved oak case, dating from 1556, and likewise the beautiful carved wooden pulpit, dating from 1742. Other works of art in that church, such as the paintings of Flemish masters, like "The Last Supper," and the "Martyrdom of St. Erasmus" by Diereck Bouts, and other paintings by Van Rillearz, Flemalle, and Roger van der Weyden, together with other movable treasures were saved by Captain Thelamann, an art connoisseur, serving with the German army, who turned these objects over to the safe keeping of Dr. Neerinx, the acting burgomaster of Louvain. Among these art treasures were many valuable silver and gold church vessels and figurines of saints, dating from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. All the paintings in the Academy of Fine Arts were likewise saved and safely stored. The story that all the churches of Louvain were laid in ashes because the Germans held the priests and friars responsible for the revolt of the populace is grossly untrue. While I was in Louvain I made it a point to enter all the churches and chapels there and found them all standing intact, without any indications of sacrilege, excepting only St. Peters with its damaged roof. Of those churches I can only recall off-hand those of St. Michael, of St. James, of St. Gertrudis, the chapel of

St. Hubert and the Chapel of the Holy Spirit. Before I left Louvain a Louvain architect had already been commissioned by the Germans to restore the damaged roof of the cathedral, in which work he was being assisted by German help, in money and labor.

Subsequently expert commissioners were sent to Louvain by the German Government to make a thorough investigation and to see to it that no further art treasures should be either damaged or carried away. Among these commissioners were Dr. Carl Helfferich of the German Bank and Dr. von Falke, the well known art expert.

All that remains for me to discuss is the question, how far the Germans were justified in doing as they did at Louvain. Aside from downright condemnation there are two points of view from which their conduct there can be regarded.

One is that civilians were killed and houses destroyed at Louvain as an act of retaliation, that is to say, vengeance. This motive undoubtedly had much to do with the spontaneous conduct of the German soldiers, as was but natural in the circumstances. As an American, of considerable military experience, I think it only just to remind you of the fact that our American military code recognizes the principle of retaliation. Here is the paragraph relating to this point in our "Instructions for the government of armies of the United States in the field" as submitted to the latest international conferences at the Hague:

"The law of war can no more wholly dispense with retaliation than can the law of nations, of which it is a branch. Yet civilized nations acknowledge retaliation as the sternest feature of war. A reckless enemy often leaves to his opponent no other means of securing himself against the repetition of barbarous outrage."

As most of you will know we had countless instances of retaliation during our American Civil War. An international case of retaliation in American history was the bombardment of Greytown in Nicaragua by an American squadron during the fifties.

The other point of view is that such stern measures are not undertaken in the spirit of vengeance so much as for a deterrent example, to prevent recurrence of further outrages and to crush dangerous popular uprisings on the part of armed natives. Were it not for such measures, it is held, no German's life would now be safe in Belgium. This is the official German view as voiced by General von Bissing, the commander of the seventh German Army Corps, of which the German troops in Louvain formed a part. Baron von Bissing made the following official statement in Brussels when I was there:

"The acts of reprisal practiced by our troops against the guerrillas of Belgium have been characterized and denounced as mere acts of vengeance. This is a false view. The underhanded and treacherous attacks that have been made and are still being made by the hostile population on our troops here, have made it my absolute duty to proceed against such hostile natives with iron severity. To show weakness in these cases would amount to treason to our own army."

"When a fanatic, reckless populace takes to murdering single soldiers, invalids, surgeons and nurses, when the safety of all communications is imperilled by irresponsible incendiaries in our rear, the law of self-preservation demands that all military commanders must employ the severest measures against such people, even though the innocent have to suffer with the guilty. Only thus can the occupied regions be preserved from the horrors of partisan warfare."

That this point of view is not foreign to our own military institutions you will gather from the following paragraph of our own American field service regulations, which I have here:

"Paragraph 82. Men, or squads of men, who commit hostilities, whether by fighting, or by inroads for destruction or plunder, or by raids of any kind, without commission, without being part and portion of the organized hostile army, and without sharing continuously in the war, but who do so, with intermitting returns to their homes and advocations, or with the occasional assumption of the semblance of peaceful pursuits, by divesting themselves of the character or appearance of soldiers—such men, or squads of men, are not public enemies, and, therefore, if captured, are not entitled to the privileges of prisoners of war, but shall be treated summarily as highway robbers or pirates."

As many of you must know there have been many, many instances of our adhesion to such practice in American history, notably during General Sherman's march to the sea, during our various Indian wars, when Indian men and women were often killed indiscriminately, and during our Mexican war and Phillipine campaigns, where we had to deal with guerillas.

I myself was present in Nicaragua when our men of the navy and marine corps were treacherously attacked by native pacificos at León, where two of our men were shot down right beside me, and I can assure you that our officers and men did not hesitate to retaliate by shooting back. Of the natives then killed, many were apparently pacific civilians.

I was also at Vera Cruz in Mexico, when that place was forcefully taken by our blue-jackets and marines. There, too, a library was destroyed and a number of apparently pacific native men and women were killed, among them some neutral foreigners. There, too, the American officer in command, Rear Admiral Fletcher, threatened to lay the defenceless town in ashes unless all resistance ceased at once.

There is a French saying that "an omelet cannot be made without breaking eggs" and there is another French saying that "war is war." We have an American saying, attributed to General Sherman, which is even more graphic. As a man who had to follow many wars I can only tell you that General Sherman was right, when he said: "War is hell." When those misguided men of Louvain opened fire on those unsuspecting German soldiers in their city, they let hell loose upon Louvain. If the Germans had not done as they did an even worse hell would have been let loose over all Belgium, and Belgium now would be in the same state of bloody anarchy as Mexico.



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